UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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APPROVAL OF UNDP ASSISTANCE TO A PROJECT OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF BENIN, GHANA, IVORY COAST, MALI, NIGER, TOGO AND UPPER VOLTA

Onchocerciasis Control Programme in the Volta River Basin
(RAF/79/008)

Report of the Administrator*

Date of present approval:	April 1979
Starting date of project activities:	1/
Planned completion date:	December 1981
To be executed by:	International Development Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) (as fiscal agent) and the World Health Organization (WHO)(which will undertake field work)
Government implementing agencies:	Ministries of Health
Estimated cost of assistance planned under present approval:	$1 895 000
Source of UNDP financing:	Regional Indicative Planning Figure (IPF)

I. Background

1. Onchocerciasis, or river blindness, by affecting the vision and physical fitness of people afflicted with it, is the single most debilitating disease preventing population settlement and economic development in the valleys of the Volta River Basin area - in **Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Togo and Upper Volta.**
Apart from being a public health problem, (over one million people were estimated to be infected in the area), onchocerciasis contributed to overpopulation in the poor soil areas neighbouring the affected valleys and is an obstacle to the whole socio-economic development of the savannah belt of the Volta River Basin area which is primarily based on agriculture and cattle raising.

1/ This project constitutes a direct contribution to the Onchocerciasis Control Programme and the first contribution will be made available during 1979.

* In accordance with General Assembly resolution 2688 (XXV) and subsequent authorizations of the UNDP Governing Council, reports are issued seriatim on the approval of UNDP assistance of $250,000 or more (including, if any, assistance financed by Government or by third-party cost sharing).

2. In response to the requests of the seven countries concerned, a Preparatory Assistance Mission was organized and financed largely by UNDP in 1971 (RAF/71/188 and later, RAF/72/128) with the main objective of establishing a strategy for a programme for the control of onchocerciasis in the river basin. Guided by a Steering Committee made up of the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNDP, the Mission prepared a report constituting the over-all strategy for the Onchocerciasis Control Programme (OCP) which was launched in 1974 with an expected duration of 20 years.

3. The World Bank accepted the responsibility for assisting in marshalling the necessary funds for the activity and subsequently managing the OCP Fund while WHO is responsible for the field operations. For the major part of the first phase (1974-1979), UNDP specifically financed part of the research and training components of the programme under the project RAF/74/004 2/. However, it was decided in 1978, for practicality in reporting procedures and to adhere to a principle of untied contributions for all donors, that UNDP would henceforth be contributing directly to the Fund for the years 1979 to 1981.

4. The financing of the second phase of the OCP (1980-1985) is presently being secured. Certain donors have urged that greater importance be put on the Economic Development Unit of the Programme Director's office to ensure long-term success of the programme aside from health aspects. This would, in turn, ensure greater involvement of the National Onchocerciasis Committees in the programme which is desirable because they will one day take over the programme. Another step in this direction is the appointment of the recently-formed Commission on Alternative Technologies, whose mandate is to pursue serious and imaginative study on methods of bringing down costs of the OCP with the goal of transferring administrative and operation control and responsibility for the Programme to recipient countries.

II. Objectives and activities

5. The objective of the OCP is to reduce the impact of onchocerciasis to a sufficiently low level so that it no longer represents either a public health problem or an obstacle to socio-economic development and also to maintain and adjust control activities so as to stabilize the disease at a tolerable level.

6. Since at present the disease is not amenable to mass chemotherapy, onchocerciasis control depends largely on controlling the blackfly vector, Simulium Damnosum, with larvicides. To attain its objective, the programme will continue to pursue a series of activities initiated during the first phase. These activities are as follows: organization of aerial larvicide operations; carrying out entomological surveillance of the treated areas; evaluation of the operations by regular epidemiological investigations; regular monitoring of the long-term safety of the larvicide treatment for the environment.

7. In addition, intensive research will also be undertaken in chemotherapy for mass application and in developing appropriate alternative technologies for vector control. National personnel will also be trained in the various disciplines for maintenance of the continuing success of the operations.

2/ DP/PROJECTS/1865.

III. Inputs

8. Since UNDP has become a regular donor to the Programme, the UNDP contribution will be made directly to the OCP Fund.

IV. Financial data

9. The expenditure components of the UNDP contribution are as follows for the remaining years of the UNDP current cycle (1979-1981):

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Mission costs	30 000
UNDP direct costs	1 865 000
	1 895 000

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